

FACTSHEET

Plant Protection & Quarantine

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service

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A Guide to Shipping Foreign Plants Home

Many travelers who venture abroad purchase plants as souvenirs. Often these travelers, or even commercial importers who purchase thousands of plant products for resale purposes, do not realize that one little blossom or seedling could carry a harmful pest or disease capable of causing millions of dollars' worth of damage to America's agriculture. To prevent such an occurrence, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is charged with ensuring that only pest- and disease-free agricultural products enter this country.

Each year, officers within APHIS' Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) unit inspect an estimated 460 million plants that are mailed, carried, or shipped into this country by travelers, brokers, and nursery owners. PPQ tries to ensure that foreign pests, like the Mediterranean fruit fly and golden nematode, and diseases, like chrysanthemum white rust and citrus canker, do not hitchhike on plants and destroy America's bountiful agriculture.

Working With APHIS

If you wish to bring foreign plant products to the United States, APHIS recommends that you first contact PPQ to learn whether you need to secure an agricultural import permit or simply declare the plant products upon entering this country on a declaration form provided by the Department of the Treasury's U.S. Customs Service. Heeding this recommendation could not only save time for both you and PPQ inspectors but also prevent many potential hassles, which could include the PPQ inspector having to confiscate your plant products.

Securing a Permit

If PPQ advises you to secure an agricultural import permit, you must complete a simple form that requests such basic information as the scientific name of the plant, the expected place of entry, and

the country where the plant was grown. Importers should plan ahead and secure agricultural import permits for their shipments far in advance of their transport. Travelers who wish to import plants and who do not have enough time to secure permits should declare their plants on their Customs declaration form and follow the instructions provided by the inspector.

PPQ will also tell you whether you need to obtain a phytosanitary certificate from the exporting country. These certificates verify that the plant quarantine officials of the exporting country examined the plants for pests and diseases prior to their leaving the country and the plants meet U.S. import requirements.

In addition to the import permit forms, you may wish to request that PPQ send you a green-and-yellow mailing label, which will ensure that your mailed plant products are directed to the nearest plant inspection station. At these stations, PPQ officers examine and—provided that no pests or diseases are found—forward the plant products to the destination you requested.

If your plant products do not require a permit, you should simply declare them on your Customs declaration form and show them to the PPQ inspector at your port of entry.

For further information or to obtain agricultural import permits, contact PPQ:

USDA-APHIS-PPQ
Permit Unit
4700 River Road, Unit 136
Riverdale, MD 20737-1236
Telephone (301) 734-8645
Telefax (301) 734-5786

Common Plant Products and Their Entry Status

The following is a list of commonly imported plants and their entry status:

Flower bulbs—In general, admitted. Must be free of soil. Anemone bulbs from Germany and gladiolus bulbs from Africa, prohibited.

Flowers—Fresh cut or dried, subject to inspection but generally admitted if free of pests.

Plants—All plants in soil, prohibited. Most kinds of dried plants, flowers, and leaves for herbarium or decorative purposes, admitted. Live plants, shrubs, trees, and fresh cuttings, either prohibited or permit required. Postentry quarantine may be required.

Seeds—Of flowers, shrubs, trees, and other plants, admitted in general. Tree and shrub seeds require a permit.

Packing materials—Peat moss, sphagnum moss, wood shavings, sawdust, paper, and excelsior, admitted. Grass, straw, and similar unprocessed plant materials, prohibited.

There are exceptions to the above list because requirements differ for materials introduced from certain nations, like Canada, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and Mexico. Also, procedures may differ for large commercial shipments. These exceptions emphasize the importance of contacting PPQ in advance for import instructions.

Inspection Stations

When your plants arrive at 1 of the 15 plant inspection stations listed on page 3, PPQ inspectors will collect all of the documentation from you or the importer and examine the plants. With the exception of only a few specified types, plants must not be rooted in growing media, such as soil, because insects, diseases, and noxious weeds could reside there.

If PPQ inspectors discover a pest, disease, or noxious weed, they take a sample and complete an interception form, which describes what they have discovered and identified. The sample is then taken to one of APHIS' many specialists who confirms the identification and determines if the plants should be released, treated, reexported, or destroyed.

APHIS handles all plants with great care and tries to return plants to their owners as quickly as possible.

CITES Enforcement

All PPQ plant inspection stations have been designated by the U.S. Department of the Interior as approved ports to handle endangered species plants and plant products, like exotic orchids and cacti, that are protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). PPQ inspectors inspect consignments or shipments of CITES-listed plants to ensure that the plant specimens match the description of the accompanying CITES documents. If travelers or

importers do not have the proper CITES documents, PPQ inspectors must seize the plants and offer them back to their country of origin at that country's expense or place the plants in one of the many Interior-designated rescue centers in this country, where they are displayed for the public to enjoy.

PPQ requires that importers obtain a general permit costing \$70 from the PPQ Permit Unit for any commercial shipments of CITES-listed products they wish to bring into this country.

Importers should contact the PPQ Permit Unit at the address listed above if they have any questions about importing CITES-listed plants.

Tips for Buying, Handling, and Shipping

The following general suggestions can be a guide to aid you in buying, handling, and shipping plants. These guidelines will help your plants survive the trip home, clear as quickly as possible through APHIS' inspection process, and thrive in your garden or on market shelves.

Buying. Be selective about the plants you buy. Plants that grow well in a foreign location may not do well in your garden or other sites in the United States. Buy plants from reputable dealers. Plants collected from the wild and those not grown in greenhouses are more likely to require treatment before being admitted to the United States.

Cleaning and inspection. Remove all soil and other growing media from all parts of the plants before you ship or bring them home. Plants arriving with sand, soil, or earth will be refused entry. However, epiphytic plants (such as orchids) established on tree-fern slabs or similar soil-free media may be admitted. (Contact PPQ's Permit Unit to determine other soil-free media that are allowed.)

Inspect your plants carefully and discard those obviously diseased or infested with insects. Do not treat plants yourself. Plant inspection station treatments are given only when necessary and are specific for the pest being controlled.

Packaging for shipment. Improper packaging is the most common cause of plant death or deterioration during shipment. APHIS inspectors frequently find plants that have been jammed into small containers, oversaturated in plastic bags, or damaged by the use of nonprotective containers.

The best state in which to ship plants is while they are dormant. In this state, they are more likely to withstand temperature extremes, dehydration, other rigors of transit, and the effects of treatments at inspection stations.

Use a sturdy container for shipment. Pack the plants loosely, using crumpled newspaper or excelsior to protect them from bruising and to allow free air movement.

Do not enclose the plants in plastic bags, where they will receive too much or too little moisture and will deteriorate.

Mailing. To minimize delay and expense, you may mail plant materials directly to an APHIS plant inspection station, preferably by parcel post.

PPQ inspectors strongly recommend the following:

- Pack the plants in sturdy boxes or crates.
- Indicate what is inside the package by marking the outside.
- Use APHIS' green-and-yellow mailing label to ensure proper handling of your package. (At your request, these labels can be included when your import permit is issued.)
- Send the packages by priority mail.
- Enclose a note with your name, mailing address, and permit number, so the inspectors can forward the package to you after the inspection.
- Enclose the proper postage fee for forwarding the plants to your address.
- Send your package to: USDA, APHIS, PPQ, at one of the following addresses:

Arizona

102 Terrace Ave., Rm. 116
Nogales, AZ 85621

California

Los Angeles International Airport
9650 S. La Cienega Blvd.
Inglewood, CA 90301

San Francisco International Airport
P.O. Box 250009
San Francisco, CA 94125-0009

U.S. Border Station
P.O. Box 43-L
San Ysidro, CA 92073

Florida

Plant Inspection Station
P.O. Box 592136
Miami, FL 33159

Orlando Inspection Station
9317 Tradeport Dr.
Orlando, FL 32827

Hawaii

P.O. Box 50002
Honolulu, HI 96820

Louisiana

U.S. Custom House
423 Canal Street
New Orleans, LA 70130

New Jersey

209 River Street
Hoboken, NJ 07030

New York

John F. Kennedy International Airport
Plant Inspection Station
Building 77, Room 1-27
Jamaica, NY 11430

Puerto Rico

Comercio Street, South, Rm. 4
P.O. Box 3386
San Juan, PR 00904

Texas

Los Indios Plant Inspection Station
P.O. Drawer 393
Los Indios, TX 78567

Cordova Border Station
3600 East Paisano
Room 172-A
El Paso, TX 79905

Houston Inspection Station
3004 Mecom Rd.
Houston, TX 77032

Washington

Federal Office Building
Room 9014
Seattle, WA 98104

Help APHIS Protect U.S. Agriculture

Whether you are mailing a boxwood home from England, shipping a few crates of philodendrons from Central America, or carrying orchids back from Thailand, USDA encourages you to follow the proper procedures for importing plants and plant products. You can beautify America's landscape with foreign plants and also protect the Nation from harmful insects and diseases by being responsible when shipping foreign plants home.